1: Conzemius M-4, 5 (1921) 1932
SA15 Mosquito SA15

BETROTHAL AND TRIAL MARRIAGE.—The children are sometimes engaged by their respective parents while still in early infancy, even at the age of 5 or 6 years. The young boy makes his fiancée and her parents a small present, and helps them occasionally in their work. When she arrives at the age of puberty (about 10 years) he takes her as his wife. The man is considered a member of his wife's family and he goes to live in the house of his parents-in-law. When the family enlarges he will build a house of his own near by. Perhaps a misunderstanding of the above facts has led M. W. (309) to state that a system of trial marriage existed in those days among the Miskito. According to this author the probationary period lasted about two years, at the end of which a feast was prepared and then the union was considered legitimate, there being no ceremony. To-day the young man marries generally at the age of from 16 to 18, the girl at about 12.

WEDDING.—Exquemelin (Engl. edit.: 253; French edit.: II, 267-268) gives the following account of the marriage ceremony of the Miskito during the latter part of the seventeenth century. The father, after assuring himself that the lover was an expert hunter and fisher, ordered his daughter to bring a calabash of a beverage prepared from pineapples and honey; the suitor drank one-half of the contents and then tendered the remainder to his future wife to drink. According to this same author the buccaneers had the habit of buying a Miskito woman for a knife, ax, or hatchet, upon their arrival at Cabo Gracias a Dios. She was obliged to remain with him during the time he stayed at the settlement and to supply him with the products of the plantation, while he went out hunting and fishing. (Exquemelin, Engl. edit.: 249).

Among the Sumu the nuptial ceremony is performed by an elderly man who first gives the couple a long talk. Then the two aspirants join the thumb of the right hand, whereupon he separates their hands by cutting through with his own hand. There is no record of the chiefs having possessed the *jus primæ noctis* as appears to have been the case with the Chorotega (Orotiña) of the Pacific coast of Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Marriage with other tribes was not permitted in former days by the Sumu, and the children of strangers were killed. This accounts for the fact that the Sumu have kept themselves free from foreign admixtures, whereas the Miskito intermarry with all races and absorb everything. The Sumu are very jealous of their wives and until recent times did not allow them to converse with strangers.

MOTHER-IN-LAW TABOO.—As soon as the marriage ceremony has taken place the young Sumu husband must not speak any more to his mother-in-law, nor even look at her. When he is at home she remains in her own apartment, which is separated from the remainder

1: Conzemius M-4, 5 (1921) 1932
SA15 Mosquito SA15

death. At the conclusion of the third day the woman bathes herself in a neighboring creek and then rejoins her family. All cooking or drinking vessels used by her during this period are broken and thrown away. 841

Among the Sumu similar beliefs are held with regard to menstruation. The woman, however, never leaves her home, but she remains secluded in a corner of the house, a cloth partition separating her quarters from the rest of the hut. The Miskito habit of retiring to a provisional ranch or "going to the bush" (M.: *untara dimaya;* T., P.: *asañpas kana;* U.: *asañpas awañ*) has never been practiced by the Sumu, and it would appear as if it was in former days also unknown among the Miskito. In fact the Sumu state that the menstruous woman must keep away from the bush, where she might be attacked by jaguars, pumas, or snakes, or where she might be seduced by a spirit in anthropomorphic or zoömorphic form. When the three days are over the woman takes a steam bath at home. The latter is prepared by heating a few large white stones and then pouring water upon them, while the woman will bend over them with a thick blanket thrown over the naked body. After this she is no longer considered unclean.

Celibacy.—Celibacy is considered as something abnormal and uncanny among the Indians; people leading presumably an irreproachable celibate life are supposed to practice sexual intercourse with spirits. 589

Prostitution.—Prostitution is now met with among the Miskito inhabiting such settlements as have a large percentage of foreigners or Ladinos, but this has never been a recognized institution as among the more civilized tribes of Mexico and Central America. 548

Polygamy.—Polygamy exists, but it is not very common, and is generally limited to men of rank, as sorcerers. I have known Indians with 4 and even 5 or 6 wives, who all lived under the same roof. Each one of the women had her own hearth and cooking utensils and she prepared the food for herself and her children. The husband ate wherever he preferred. When he wished to buy something for his favorite wife he must treat the others alike in order to avoid scenes of jealousy which, it must be said, are very rare. The women have rarely a dispute with each other; sometimes they are all sisters, the oldest one, however, being generally the mistress of the house. They call each other *lakma* (M.) or *kaltiñ* (S.). Sometimes an Indian with wife and children may adopt a young orphan girl with the intention of making her his wife when she arrives at puberty. 595

According to Henderson (223) the Miskito King George, who governed at the beginning of the nineteenth century, had as many as 22 wives. M. W. (309) and Sloane (a: I, p. lxxvii) mention the existence of polygamy for this tribe; elsewhere, however, the

1: Conzemius M-4, 5 (1921) 1932
SA15 Mosquito SA15

595 last-named author (b: IV, 279) states that the Miskito have only one wife. Dampier (I, 9) and Jeffery (45) likewise state that the Miskito marry but one wife with whom they live until death separates them.

586 DIVORCE.—Occasionally husband and wife separate by mutual consent, the children remaining in charge of the mother. A woman is generally abandoned by her husband if she does not give birth to any children. The young husband does not remain at the hut of his parents-in-law when he is sick, but returns home to undergo treatment; in case his disease is incurable, or if he is lazy or cruel, he may not be admitted again at the house of his parents-in-law, and the marriage is then considered dissolved. The husband has, however, the right to claim payment for all the presents he has made to his wife or to her family.

587 REMARRIAGE.—If a widow wishes to remarry she must be bought from the heirs, that is, the relations of her dead husband. Such a payment is known as "widow money" (M.: *pyarka mana;* T., P.: *tiāmak minit;* U.: *pyarka makalnak*). The widow is considered the property of her husband and with the death of the latter passes to his relations.

In no case is a widow allowed to remarry until the festival of the dead (M.: *sikro, sikro;* S.: *sdū*) has taken place, which is about one year after the death of her husband. In case the future husband agrees to have this festival celebrated at his own expense, he need not pay anything else for the widow. The author who wrote about 1699 under the initials M. W. (309) was evidently mistaken in stating that among the Miskito the widow was allowed to remarry three days after the death of her husband. According to Exquemelin (Engl. edit.: 254), who wrote about the same period, this action could not take place until two years later.

CHILDREN: THEIR BIRTH AND EDUCATION

844 SECLUSION AT CHILDBIRTH.—The prospective Miskito mother occupies a small hut (*dāūkan watla*), built for her by her husband in the bush, at a short distance from her home, just as she does during the menstrual period. She remains there about two weeks, accompanied by a female relation or friend. She has to observe similar regulations as at the menses, for she is considered impure and may pollute the house and contaminate the other inmates. She is particularly exposed to attack from snakes, beasts, and supernatural beings, and neither she nor her child must be seen by the sukya. She must also abstain from certain food, not only on account of her own well-being, but also on that of the community as a whole. The Sumu woman, however, accouches in a corner of the hut, which has been screened off either with bark cloth or with thatch.

2: Kirchhoff E-4 (no date) 1948
SA15 Mosquito SA15

Among the *Mosquito* and *Sumo* a man who has been wronged is considered a coward if he does not avenge himself. If revenge fails, both the offended man and the perpetrator of the offense are supposed to commit suicide. A thief, when caught, must return double the amount stolen. A creditor may help himself to his debtor's property, or he may destroy the property of a third person, in which case the debtor must pay the damage (*Mosquito*). An adulterous wife is beaten and forced to reveal the name of her lover, who is fined. A murderer is killed, unless he commits suicide, and his memory is dishonored. There is, however, no dishonor in poisoning an enemy, the method employed for most murders.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

A man and woman may agree to marry, or, more rarely, the girl's parents may make marriage arrangements without her consent. Child betrothals are common. Cross-cousin marriage is frequent, but marriage between parallel-cousins and closer relations is forbidden. *Mosquito* and *Sumo* chiefs and shamans have several wives, and the *Paya* of Río Platano and Río Paulaya practice polygyny, as do the *Jicaque*.

Before marriage a man must pass through various ordeals, pay the bride's family an agreed sum, and prepare a field for his prospective wife. The wedding is a simple ceremony. The levirate and sororate are practiced, and the many possible exceptions to this rule are adjusted by payments. A man may abandon his wife if she is barren. Divorce is accomplished by means of payments to the families of offended parties. The woman always keeps the children. Among numerous relationship taboos are the important mother-in-law taboo and the prohibition on a man's speaking to his sister-in-law and to other close female relatives by marriage.

LIFE CYCLE

Childbirth.—The *Paya* and *Mosquito* build special confinement huts; the *Sumo* partition off a corner of the house. During parturition the mother is aided by another woman who cuts the cord with a piece of bamboo. The afterbirth and umbilical cord are buried. Among the *Paya* a midwife is regarded by parents and child as a blood relative. This belief is said to have originated among the *Mosquito* and diffused to the *Sumo* and *Paya*. The second of twins and deformed children are killed (*Mosquito* and *Sumo*). Some female children were killed at birth.

Sumo and *Mosquito* women bathe immediately after bearing a child, *Paya* women on the third day. *Sumo* women take a steam bath but use no special structure; in other tribes they bathe in the river. This bath ends a period of ritual impurity. *Mosquito* women, however, are considered impure for one or two weeks. Women also observe a special diet. The return of the mother to the house is celebrated with a ceremony.